

Explanation and Clarification on Tier I, II & III School Designation

The intent of this document is to clarify the recent ranking of Vermont schools and the designation of the state's ten "persistently low-achieving schools." This ranking was a requirement of the U.S. Department of Education (USED), and the determination process used in Vermont was reviewed and approved by USED in January 2010. The ten designated schools are eligible for further federal funding and support from the Vermont Department of Education (VTDOE). Application for funding and participation is a local school board decision. If any of these ten schools apply for funds, it is with the agreement they will follow one of four school improvement models defined by the USED. The VTDOE is providing technical assistance to the superintendents of all ten affected schools, and will continue to do so throughout the application process and the life of the grant.

The Ranking

In 2009, Vermont received \$77 million in education stimulus aid for schools as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Upon accepting the funds, VTDOE was required to rank all schools receiving Title I funds who were also identified by the state accountability system for not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the most recent assessment cycle (2008/2009). Secondly, VTDOE was required to rank all schools that include the 9-12 grade span that were eligible for but not receiving Title I funds during that same timeframe. Note: Not every Vermont school meets these criteria; therefore, not every school in Vermont was ranked.

This federally approved process calculates the sum of four different indicators for each school, and based on this combined ranking score, requires the identification of schools as falling into one of the following categories:

1. **Tier I** – the five lowest achieving Title I schools identified by Vermont's school accountability system (AYP);
2. **Tier II** – the five lowest achieving secondary schools that are eligible for but not receiving Title I funds; or
3. **Tier III** – all other Title I schools in need of improvement.

The four indicators are:

1. Proficiency of all students on 2008/2009 NECAP¹ (state assessment) in mathematics;
2. Proficiency of all students on 2008/2009 NECAP in reading;
3. Progress of all students on NECAP reading over at least two years; and
4. Progress of all students on NECAP mathematics over at least two years.

The full formula and explanation for this process is included in the companion document.

Participation Requirements

All 69 schools identified as Tier I, II or III are eligible for significant additional federal school improvement funding and support from VTDOE through the federal FY 2010/11 School Improvement Grant, once it is approved, later this spring. First priority for funding and support must be given to participating Tier I and II schools, and only Tier I and II schools choosing to accept additional federal school improvement funding must agree to follow one of four USED designated school improvement models:

¹ New England Common Assessment Program

1. Close the school and send students to other schools;
2. Close the school and reopen under charter authority;
3. Replace the principal and at least 50 percent of the teaching staff; or
4. Replace the principal if they have been leading the school for more than two years and implement a series of required actions under the Transformation Model.

Participating Tier III schools are eligible for funds and support but do not have to carry out these same requirements.

Please note, according to USED guidelines, this system ranks schools in relation to each other. Therefore, if Vermont is required to repeat this process next year, the updated data for all schools will affect where any individual school may fall in the ranking. There will also be schools that will not be included (i.e., Tier I and II schools that implement one of the four models), while other schools may be added (i.e., Title I schools identified by the 2009/2010 AYP). Because various factors contribute to the ranking, including school's status in relation to being eligible for and receiving Title I funding, we caution against using this year's rankings to estimate where a school might be in any future ranking.

Also, although states were required to use the most recent state assessment data available at the time of the ranking (Vermont 2008/2009 NECAP scores), this does not constitute a new state accountability system. All schools identified for not making AYP are still required to participate in any corrective actions, defined by the State Accountability System articulated in Title 16 of the Vermont Statutes.